

Benchmarking Study Team Executive Summary

January 2000

Introduction

In 1998, the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) conducted a customer satisfaction survey for external customers. Results of the external survey showed that although Reclamation was generally doing a reasonable job, there were several areas where customer service improvements could be made. In 1999, Reclamation surveyed its employees on customer service.

In April 1999, a Reclamation-wide Benchmarking Study Team (BST) was established as a customer service initiative. Following the completion of benchmarking training in June, the BST was directed to investigate and recommend customer service improvement measures applicable to Reclamation. The study approach was to use benchmarking techniques and tools through which “pockets of excellence” would be determined, researched, and analyzed to develop recommendations for adaptation in Reclamation's business practices.

Based on the two surveys and input from Reclamation's top managers and external participants at a 1999 Reclamation-sponsored Benchmarking conference, the BST determined the following five study areas warranted the greatest benefits toward improved customer service by Reclamation staff:

- Single point of contact
- Written communications
- Different customer groups
- Employee customer service training
- Resource aids/tools used to support customer service

Preliminary research yielded a list of agencies and offices, internal and external to Reclamation, that could potentially be of help with the five study areas. Secondary research and preliminary interviews with these agencies and offices provided adequate information for the BST to narrow the list of potential benchmarking partners. Two Reclamation area offices and one committee were identified as internal partners. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Service Centers, consisting of the Farm Service Administration (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS), and Rural Development (RD) offices, who share customer service activities, were proposed and accepted as the single external benchmarking partner.

This report, and the accompanying recommendations and implementation plans report, address the five study areas benchmarked by the BST. Findings were based on identified process activities of Reclamation's three internal partners and the external partner.

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Planning Process

The first phase of a benchmarking effort involves the planning process. Following Reclamation's development of a Customer Service Plan in 1994, the formulation of customer service principles and values, the completion of a Customer Satisfaction Survey in 1998, and initiation of a customer information management system (CIS), another customer service initiative began. The purpose of the new initiative was to compare Reclamation's 1998 customer satisfaction baseline data to other organizations through the use of benchmarking.

In addition, a Reclamation Employee Customer Satisfaction Survey was completed in 1999. The purpose of this survey was to gather information about Reclamation's customer service program and performance. In order to gather comparable data, an effort was made to mirror the questions asked in the 1998 Customer Satisfaction Survey.

As a result of the feedback received from the 1998 Customer Satisfaction Survey, a ten member Customer Services Initiatives Team (CSIT) was established. Sponsored by Carmen R. Maymi and with Commissioner's Office, Regional Office, and Reclamation Service Center representation, the CSIT addressed customer service areas identified for improvement.

In April 1999, Reclamation expanded its customer service efforts with the addition of a benchmarking initiative and established and trained a Benchmarking Study Team (BST) for the purpose of conducting a customer service benchmarking study. This initiative focused on customer service areas and processes identified as needing improvement that could be benchmarked with the intent to positively improve processes and ways Reclamation employees interact with our diverse customers. The BST membership encompassed representation from various disciplines within Reclamation from the Regions and Area Offices, the Reclamation Service Center, and the Commissioner's Office.

In support of the BST development, the agency enlisted the USDA Graduate School to provide consultation and facilitation in the development of a benchmark planning approach which was most appropriate for the goals of this initiative.

The first step was to train the CSIT and BST membership. Training was conducted in June of 1999 and focused on the following steps necessary to carry out the initiative:

! Define CSIT and BST roles and responsibilities:

Customer Service Initiatives Team

- < Oversee the benchmarking project
- < Act as champions and advocates for the initiative
- < Act as the bridge to the Executive Sponsor, Regional Offices, Area Offices, the field and employee union organizations
- < Keep Reclamation managers and employees informed of BST progress
- < Assist in data research and gathering
- < Work with Argonne National Laboratory and USDA Graduate School
- < Provide advice and support when needed
- < Provide a sounding board for ideas and recommendations
- < Assist in adapting benchmarking practices

Benchmarking Study Team

- < Keep Executive Sponsor and CSIT informed of progress; they keep Directors, Area Managers and Union Officials informed
- < Be a resource to Reclamation for Benchmarking
- < Develop a vision statement
- < Search for “best practices”
 - ***gathering*** information from partners
 - ***analyzing*** application of data applied toward business practices
 - ***developing*** performance criteria
 - ***determining*** results from gap analysis
 - ***evaluating*** anticipated implementation actions
 - ***recommending*** implementation actions
- < Adequately plan, collect, analyze information to formulate and make recommendations
- < Accomplish benchmarking up to the adapting or implementation stage

BST Member Personal Commitments

- < Actively participate in developing a team charter and defining team roles
- < Maintain a high level of professionalism, reliability, and action
- < Rely on E-mail systems and teleconferencing
- < Limit travel to accomplish specific goals backed with documentation
- < Acknowledge time commitments from 10-100 percent in any given pay period
- < Meet the completion target by December 31, 1999

- ! **Establish a BST Charter:** The document formed the basis and scope of the benchmarking initiative and describe the purpose and roles for the team.
- ! **Assign BST Members to Sub-Teams:** Based upon the concepts of benchmarking presented at the training, the process involved four phases to be carried out by BST members and sub-teams. Sub-teams were assigned according to experience, skills, and interest. The sub-team roles were:
 - < **Planning:** Establish readiness for the benchmarking initiative, develop a team charter, develop a benchmarking code of conduct and memorandum of agreement, and overall planning document.
 - < **Collecting:** Conduct research and obtain information for the five determined customer services process areas, actively seek additional information associated with the customer service areas identified for benchmarking, and collect the necessary information during the actual benchmarking process with partners.
 - < **Analyzing:** Analyze initial research information collected from benchmarking partners and identify performance gaps between Reclamation's processes and benchmark partner process approaches.
 - < **Presenting:** Present to the Executive Sponsor and the CSIT benchmarking study findings and provide detailed implementation recommendations for the five customer service areas.
- ! **Process to Identify Benchmarking Areas:** Data analysis of survey(s) results.
- ! **Develop a Master Plan for Accomplishing BST Activities:** Develop time-lines, responsibilities, and processes to accomplish the initiative in the most timely, comprehensive, and most cost effective way possible.

! **Assess Organizational Readiness for Benchmarking:** As part of the June 1999, USDA Benchmarking training a five-part benchmarking analysis survey was used by the Executive Sponsor, CSIT, and BST members to determine Reclamation's benchmarking capabilities.¹ Results of the current state analysis for Reclamation, as noted by the survey narratives, were as follows:

- **Benchmarking Readiness**
Reclamation can benchmark similar Reclamation-wide processes with similar organizations or internal portions of Reclamation with similar processes. Effort would lend itself to significant buy-in and organizational leverage since internally controlled.
- **Culture Readiness**
The potential for cultural issues which could risk rejection of the best practices before or during implementation.
- **Implementation Readiness**
The need to identify and clarify potential issues requiring leadership and corporate buy-in. Suggested using existing customer satisfaction survey data and determining win-win issues for Reclamation customers and employees.
- **Operation Readiness**
Reclamation is marginally ready to implement and operate the best practices, with the need for specific attention to operational issues and the prevention of rejection.
- **Technical Readiness**
Results indicated Reclamation staff have the skills needed.

¹ Keehley, Patricia, et al., *Benchmarking for Best Practices in the Public Sector*, 1997, pp. 71-79.

! **Benchmarking Process and Approach Adopted.** A Four-Step Model was adapted from the USDA training materials.²

PLAN —>	COLLECT—>	ANALYZE —>	ADAPT —>			
Project Planning (6-step process) <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Form team- Establish scope- Define process/procedures- Identify improvement areas- Define data collection areas- Complete a plan	Investigations and Data Gathering (6-step process) <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Develop partner criteria- Identify potential partners- Develop data collection methods- Begin information collection-Review/refine data collection- Conduct study	Benchmarking Project Report (6-step process) <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Combine/synthesize all data-Normalize performance- Compare current state to data- Identify best practices- Identify process enablers- Complete project report	Implementation Plan for Action (5-step process) <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Present findings- Set goals to close gaps- Create implementation strategy- <u>*Draft action plan</u>- *Implement and monitor plan <i>* To be developed and completed following the 12/31/99 presented deliverables</i>			
June	July	August	September	October	November	December

Timeline to end-of-calendar year

The second step involved the review and analysis of statistical results from the Reclamation customers and employee surveys. Following the benchmarking training, a BST and CSIT workshop was completed to clearly summarize the customer and employee feedback and identify customer service areas needing improvement.

The third step was a Benchmarking Conference hosted by Reclamation in June 1999. Through the use of individual presentations by recognized experts in the field, panel discussions, and break-out sessions, attending Reclamation Directors, CSIT, and BST, selected areas to consider. A list of possible partners was subsequently developed.

In addition, the BST determined the keywords used by the customer and employee survey respondents in their open-ended responses. The frequency of use of these words and their association with customer/employee interactions, communicated information, and policies and procedures was determined and used as an aid in focusing on customer service areas which indicated the greatest improvement.

² Benchmarking for Government Organizations, Graduate School, USDA, 1999.

The final planning phase resulted in the BST, CSIT, and Executive Sponsor determined the most significant benchmarking study areas for customer service improvement:

- **Single Point of Contact**

Determine best Ombudsman concepts used at office locations with one designated individual knowledgeable about “internal functions/services/employees” and “external customers.” Potentially tied to Public Affairs functions.

Affected Audience: External customers

Involvement: Internal with support toward external customers

Implement: Consistent decentralized process throughout Reclamation

- **Written Communications**

Determine the best process to efficiently respond to customer written communications once received by Reclamation.

Affected Audience: External customers

Involvement: Internal with support toward external customers

Implement: Consistent decentralized process throughout Reclamation

- **Different Customer Groups**

Determine the best process to identify existing and new Reclamation customer types; determine best process to identify exemplary staff or disciplines in Reclamation which deal with different types of customers.

Affected Audience: Internal and external customers

Involvement: Internal with support support toward external customers

Implement: Consistent decentralized process throughout Reclamation

- **Employee Customer Service Training** (In support of Customer Relations)

Determine best employee customer employee service training sources and processes to measure trainee customer services professional development.

Affected Audience: Internal staff

Involvement: Internal with support toward external customers

Implement: Consistent centralized process to local setting

- **Resource Aids/Tools Used to Support Customer Service**

Determine most effective tools used by “out of office” staff to maintain timely access with office and organizational staff and single point of contact with customers.

Affected Audience: Internal staff

Involvement: Internal with support toward external customers

Implement: Consistent decentralized process throughout Reclamation

Collecting Process

The second phase of a benchmarking effort involves the collection of information from identified internal and external partners determined to be best in the business or contain “pockets of excellence” relative to the five customer service benchmarking study areas.

BST efforts by the collecting sub-team included development of internal and external partner questionnaires. The purpose of the partner questionnaires was to identify possible processes, products, or services that were adaptable in improving customer service linked to the five study areas. In addition, a follow-up customer questionnaire was developed which allowed the sub-team to validate the processes, products, or services provided to Reclamation customers by our internal partners.

Internal Partner Site Visits and Interviews. Based on customer feedback from the 1998 Customer Satisfaction Survey report, employee feedback from the draft 1999 Employee Customer Service survey results, and feedback received from Reclamation management officials and benchmarking consultants, the team maintained focus on the five customer service benchmark areas.

The internal benchmarking research approach and results are detailed in Attachment B. The team conducted a thorough review and analysis of customer feedback from the 1998 Customer Satisfaction Survey results to identify Reclamation’s “pockets of excellence” in the area of customer service. Independently, several Reclamation Directors were informally interviewed by BST members to identify their known “pockets of excellence” within Reclamation.

During this process, three organizations were identified as possible internal benchmarking partners:

Dakotas Area Office, Great Plains Region
Wyoming Area Office, Great Plains Region
Engineering & Operations Committee, Lower Colorado Dams Facilities Office, Lower Colorado Region

The collecting sub-team developed a standard questionnaire which was used to survey all internal partners; this questionnaire was shared with partners prior to site visits.

On October 26-27, 1999, sub-team members visited and interviewed Dakotas Area Office managers and employees in Bismarck, North Dakota. The sub-team members completed questionnaires during each interview for use in the analysis of the data. The team also requested various documents which would be useful in determining how the organization accomplished its goal of providing excellent customer service. The sub-team members subsequently interviewed customers and stakeholders, identified by the Area Manager, to determine how they rated the Area Office in terms of customer service satisfaction.

Dakota Area Office Employees Interviewed:

Dennis Breitzman, Area Manager
Greg Gere, Deputy Area Manager
Micki Weimerskirch, Area Manager Secretary
Jeff Nettleton, Field Office Manager
Rapid City, South Dakota
Bobbi Sherwood-Widmann,
Administrative Officer
Signe Snortland, Archeologist
Kimball Banks, Native American Affairs Specialist
Curt Anderson, Civil Engineer
Rapid City, South Dakota
Arden Freitag, Chief - Facilities Management
Tim Keller, Chief - Technical Services
Michelle Klose, Civil Engineer
Jame Todd, Chief, Engineering and Construction

Dakotas Area Office Customers Interviewed:

Warren Jamison, Manager
Garrison Diversion Conservancy District
Carrington, North Dakota
David Sprynczynatyk, State Engineer
North Dakota State Water Commission
Bismarck, North Dakota
Joe Kramer, Manager
Angostura Irrigation District
Oral, South Dakota
Renel Hall-Beck, Manager
Belle Fourche Irrigation District
Newell, South Dakota
Charles Murphy, Chairman
Standing Rock Sioux Tribe
Fort Yates, North Dakota

On November 5, 1999, sub-team members visited the Wyoming Area Office in Mills, Wyoming, to conduct interviews with managers and employees. The standard questionnaire was used to collect data in the same manner as the site visit to Dakotas Area Office. The Area Manager furnished a list of customers and stakeholders; the sub-team interviewed these contacts.

Wyoming Area Office Employees Interviewed:

John Lawson, Area Manager

Henrietta Manning, Supervisory Administrative
Support Assistant

Gary Maass, Chief
Administrative Service Division

Bruce Laymon, Chief
Operations and Maintenance Division

Floyd Hill, Warehouse Helper

Jay Dallman, Natural Resources Specialist

John Cole, Safety & Occupational Health Officer

Ken Randolph, Chief
Water and Land Operations Division

Lyle Myler, Hydraulic Engineer

Wyoming Area Office Customers Interviewed:

Al Condor, Area Fisheries Supervisor
Wyoming Game and Fish
Casper, Wyoming

Dennis Strauch, Manager
Pathfinder Irrigation District
Scottsbluff, Nebraska

Lawrence M. "Mike" Besson, Director
Wyoming Water Development Commission
Cheyenne, Wyoming

Larry Hootman
Wyoming State Parks
Cheyenne, Wyoming

Ann Bleed, Hydrologist
State of Nebraska
Lincoln, Nebraska

Norman E. DeMott, Manager
Goshen Irrigation District
Torrington, Wyoming

On November 15, 1999, sub-team members interviewed Reclamation members of the Engineering & Operations Committee (E&OC) at the Lower Colorado Dams Facilities Office, Boulder City, Nevada. The E&OC has representatives from 15 customer groups, with one Reclamation member (Area Manager serves with Deputy Area Manager as alternate), and one Western Area Power Administration member. The sub-team modified the standard questionnaire to be specific to the E&OC. The Area Manager furnished a list of E&OC customers/participants and the sub-team interviewed select contacts.

E&OC Interviewed Members:

Tim Ulrich, LCD Area Manager, E&OC Reclamation
Representative

Gary Bryant, LCD Deputy Area Manager, E&OC
Reclamation Alternate Representative

E&OC Surveyed Customers:

George M. Caan, Executive Director, Colorado River
Commission of Nevada

Ann T. Finley, Senior Engineer, Metropolitan Water
District of Southern California

Following sub-team interviews at the three sites and subsequent contacts with customers and stakeholders, reports were prepared to document the process and findings.

External Partner Site Visits and Interviews. Through the BST sub-teams, each of the five benchmarking study areas were initially researched. To identify potential benchmarking partners, four different sources were explored: recommendations from the 1999 Reclamation Benchmarking Conference; Reclamation document reviews; Internet searches, library reviews, and professional benchmarking organizations/association searches involving customer service and benchmarking; and, discussion with the CSIT members, peers and other agency contacts involved in customer service activities.

The BST primary research resulted in the identification of 15 potential benchmarking partners.

- State of Indiana
- US Geological Survey, DOI
- Bureau of Land Management, DOI
- Indian Health Service/Public Health Service, HHS
- Western Area Power Administration, DOE
- Bonneville Power Administration, DOE
- Internal Revenue Service (IRS)
- Social Security Administration (SSA)
- Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA)
- USDA Service Centers (Farm Service Agency, Rural Development, and Natural Resources Conservation Service)
- USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services
- USDA Food and Nutrition Service
- Electric Utility Benchmarking Association (EUBA)
- Telecommunications Benchmarking International Group (TBIG)
- DirecTV

Each potential candidate was initially evaluated through the use of a matrix grid. The grid consisted of five major customer service areas with 17 associated indicators or characteristics and the five benchmarking focus areas pursued by the BST. The BST was able to confirm which of the primary researched organizations were directly involved in different facets of customer service.

Second, to continue to narrow the number of potential benchmarking candidates, the BST applied a screen out criteria with seven screen-out criteria. The different elements guided the BST in determining which potential partners should be considered for secondary research.

Third, through the primary research BST sub-team presentations, the matrix data grid, and the screen-out criteria elements the BST sequentially narrowed the primary research list of agencies and organizations to four:

- ! Bureau of Land Management, DOI
- ! Western Area Power Administration, DOE
- ! Bonneville Power Administration, DOE
- ! USDA Service Centers (Farm Service Agency, Rural Development, and Natural Resources Conservation Service)

When the study areas findings were reported by the BST sub-teams, the team concluded that several of the potential external partners were identified by more than one study team. This observation resulted in the BST determining the potential that a single external partner could be identified as the best in the business for up to five of the benchmarking study areas and therefore substantially reduce the number of external benchmarking partners.

Finally, for approximately two months, the BST expanded its research and interviews of these four potential partners. The team focused on use of the benchmarking research approach for the five study areas.

The BST secondary research and interviews of the four potential partners resulted in the team making the recommendation for benchmarking with one external partner, specifically the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Service Centers. The three USDA agencies represented through these service centers are: the Farm Service Agency (FSA); Rural Development (RD); and, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). In addition, the BST worked with members of the USDA Service Center Implementation Team.

In seeking an external partner, the BST's mission was centered on finding an agency or office which demonstrated “pockets of excellence” in all five customer service areas. It was especially vital that an agency had developed a comprehensive plan to integrate customer service activities and employee training as part of a broader vision.

It became very apparent to the BST that the participating agencies in the USDA Service Centers are committed to customer needs. Commitment is supported nationally by a Deputy Secretary USDA Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which went through five Assistant or Under Secretaries in the USDA. The 1996 MOU assures integration of a committed customer service approach throughout the involved organizations. In addition to the MOU, the nation-wide service center concept “to provide quick, simple and convenient services to customers” has consolidated the services of these three agencies; the centers have been in operation for approximately two years. These USDA Service Centers are situated in rural to urban geographic locations in the 50 states represent multiple types of services to multiple customer bases. They have a customer service strategic plan in place which delineates their policy, goals, and linkage to annual Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) performance plan goals; have applied a customer survey; have a customer feedback system in place; and function both in highly

centralized and decentralized organizational settings. One initiative involves Customer Service & Change Management which deals directly with:

- Employee Customer Service Training,
- Change Management Training,
- Barriers to Effective Customer Service, i.e., Mission Clarity, Customer Service, Communication, Training, Consistency and Flexibility, Information Technology, Focus, Customer Service Surveys, Single Point of Contact (philosophy of the service center approaches) and Service Center Strategic Planning.

The BST concluded the USDA Service Center concepts, implementation approaches, and developed processes which will provide valuable benchmarking information to Reclamation. This consistent customer service focus, on an agency-wide basis, provides a basis to address and deal with the barriers to effective customer service. In addition, BST's contacts with the responsible USDA customer service individuals and managers have concluded they demonstrate their commitment to long term seamless customer service. Finally, the BST has concluded the primary and secondary research indicate that the USDA service center activities in respect to customer services match all benchmarking study areas.

When the USDA Service Centers were compared to the other three potential candidates following the secondary research, the BST concluded no other finalist demonstrated strong organizational commitment for all five benchmarking areas. Although each of the four final candidates exhibited unique customer approaches for Single Point of Contact and had established processes in place for responding to customer requests in a timely and documented form, only the Bonneville Power Administration appeared to also address a third area by demonstrating excellence in dealing with different customer groups (for additional information please refer to Table 3 - Attachment C).

During December and January a total of 25 USDA - FSA, RD, or NRCS State Offices or USDA Service Centers were interviewed via telephone or personal contact within 10 of Reclamation's 17 Western states by BST members. Often, multiple individuals in the respective offices participated in the interview process. In all, over 40 USDA employees and process owners provided information to the BST. State Offices contacted and interviewed included Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Utah. USDA Service Center Offices interviewed included offices in the states of California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming. In addition, two members of the USDA Service Center Implementation Team were interviewed and substantial USDA documents and process approaches obtained. These USDA approaches provided the necessary background for the BST to understand the formation of the USDA Service Centers and the customer service training process for employees within their over 2,500 service centers located throughout the 50 states.

As applied during the internal interview process, an external partner interview questionnaire (see Tool Kit #3) was extensively used by the BST to collect information. In addition, a compilation of the collected information was used by the BST as the resource base for the third phase of the benchmarking study, specifically the analysis process.

Contacted USDA State Offices:

Idaho Rural Development, USDA
Rural Business and Cooperatives
9173 West Barnes, Suite A-1
Boise, ID 83709
208-378-5623, FAX: 208-378-5643
Daryl Moser, Director

USDA - Farm Service Agency
USDA Billings Service Center
1629 Avenue D
Billings, MT 59102
406-657-6135
Kevin Johnson, Director

USDA - Farm Service Agency
Colorado State FSA Office
655 Parfet St., Suite E-305
Lakewood, CO 80215
Robert L. Eisenach, State Executive Director
303-236-2868 Extension 223
Tom Wingfield, Program Specialist (CS-Trainer)
303-236-2866

USDA - Farm Service Agency
1911 Fifth Street, Suite 211
Santa Fe, NM
505-988-6253 Extension 100
Rosalie A. Ramirez, Lead Program Technician

USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
1911 Fifth Street, Suite 201
Santa Fe, NM
505-988-6253, FAX: 505-424-4658
Sharon Elias, Soil Conversationist

Utah Rural Development State Office
Wallace F. Bennett Federal Building
125 South State Street, Room 4428,
Salt Lake City, UT 94147
(801) 524-4329
Bonnie S. Carrig, Community Programs Specialist

USDA - Food and Agricultural Councils
Bismark, North Dakota
701-239-5205
Scott B. Stofferahn, State Executive Director

Contacted USDA Service Centers/Field Offices:

USDA - Farm Service Agency
9701 Dino Drive, #170
Elk Grove, CA 95624
916-714-1104 Extension 2, FAX: 916-714-1117
Nicole M. Bell, County Executive Director

USDA - Farm Service Agency
Utah County Service Center
302 East 1860 South
Provo, UT 84606
801-377-5296, FAX: 801-356-1237
Jeanine Cook, Program Technician

USDA - Natural Resource Conservation Service
Utah County Service Center
302 East 1860 South
Provo, UT 84606
801-379-1069, FAX: 801-379-1159
Janice Richardson, Program Technician

USDA - Rural Development
6200 Jefferson NE, Room 305
Albuquerque, NM 87109
505-761-4954, FAX: 505-761-4976
Martha Topez, Loan Specialist

USDA - Rural Development and Natural Resources Conservation Service
267 Courthouse RD
Los Lunas, NM
FAX: 505-866-0662
Arthur Baca (RD), Community Development Manager, 505-865-4643
Danny Thomas (NRCS), District Conservationist, 505-865-4642 Extension 106

USDA Service Centers/Field Offices - continued

USDA - Farm Service Agency
6200 Jefferson NE
Albuquerque, NM 87109
Andrew Flores, District Director

USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
6200 Jefferson NE, Room 305
Albuquerque, NM 87109
800-410-2067 Extension 4900
Troy Hood, Assistant State Conservationist

USDA- Rural Development
Caldwell Service Center
2208 E. Chicago St., Suite C
Caldwell, ID 83605
208-459-0761 Extension 113
E-mail: mbrent@rdasun2.rurdev.usda.gov
M. Stewart Brent, Rural Development Manager

USDA - Farm Service Agency
4302 W 9th Street Road
Greeley, CO 80634
970-356-8097 Extension 111, FAX: 970-351-0392
Barbara Rehborg, Multi Family Housing Loan Specialist

USDA - Rural Development
4302 West 9th Street Road
Greeley, CO 80634
970-356-8097 Extension 107, FAX: 970-351-0392
Robert A. Miller, Community Development Manager

USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
4302 West 9th Street Road
Greeley, CO 80634
970-356-8097 Extension 3, FAX: 970-351-0392
Raymond Mowery, Soil Conservationist

USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service and
Farm Service Agency
100 East Sage
Lyman, WY 82937
307-787-3211
Leroy Jons (NRCS), District Conservationist
Tami Grasnkk (FSA)

USDA - Rural Development
1565 S. Hwy 150, Suite A
Evanston, WY 82930
307-789-9841
James K. Sabourin, Community Development Manager

USDA - Farm Service Agency
Utah County Service Center
302 East 1860 South
Provo, UT, 84606
801-377-5296, FAX: 801-356-1237
Jeanine Cook, Program Technician

USDA Service Center Implementation Team:

USDA - Farm Service Agency
Washington, DC
Leonard Covello, Team Leader - Quality Customer Service Team and Customer Service Implementation Team (CSIT) Lead
202-720-7796, lcovello@wdc.fsa.usda.gov

Kathy Huey, CSIT member, Organizational Development Specialist
301-504-4154

Analysis Process

Problem solving is a fundamental function of everyday thinking. It is the primary responsibility of supervisors and managers. Routinely, small and inconsequential problems are solved without much thought as to the process used to solve them. In contrast, larger problems require a much higher level of thought and involvement on the part of supervisors and managers. Whether large or small, solving problems is usually more successful and less stressful if a systematic and proven process is followed. Solutions to problems in the work place, that find lasting customer satisfaction, require an understanding of why the problem exists in the first place. The process must provide a focus on the root cause and determine ways to eliminate it to ensure the problem is really solved.

Six Step Process. In support of the benchmarking effort, the BST selected a six step process. The BST benchmarking effort focused on the first three steps of the process:

1. Select a problem
2. Select the root cause
3. Select a Solution(s)
4. Test the Solution(s)
5. Implement the Solution(s)
6. Track Effectiveness

At each process step the team generated ideas, data, causes, and solutions; prioritized pertinent data, analyzed the data in such a way that a decision could be selected by the team. The fourth step involved actual solution testing which is routinely accomplished by the adaptation of a process, product, or service from a benchmarked partner and integrated into the business operations. The fifth step constitutes the recommended solutions and implementation plans, presented to Reclamation's Commissioner and Policy Team on February 14, 2000. The final step tracks the measurable results from implemented recommendations and fulfillment of Reclamation's multi-year strategic plan and GPRA reported goals.

BST Analysis Actions. Initially, the BST analyzed the 1998 Reclamation customer satisfaction survey results and feedback received from Reclamation managers and benchmarking consultants who participated at a Reclamation benchmarking conference in June 1999. Five customer service areas with the greatest potential for improvement were determined that the team would focus on and develop recommendations. The areas were:

Single Point of Contact
Written Communications
Dealing with Different Customer Groups
Employee Customer Service Training
Resource Aids/Tools Used to Support Customer Service.

The team used the benchmarking process to generate data from internal and external

benchmarking partners. The internal benchmarking partners were determined through analysis of the 1998 customer service survey. The BST developed internal and external partner survey questionnaires with questions related to the five selected customer service areas. In addition, a follow-up customer survey questionnaire was developed to interview identified customers.

Specific Reclamation offices and one committee in the Great Plains and Lower Colorado Regions were surveyed first. The external benchmarking partner, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Service Centers, was selected due to their high marks in customer service based on multiple customer surveys and the reengineering of their organizational structure into “one-stop customer service centers.”

In benchmarking with any external partner, a broad perspective and understanding of the partner’s organization must be developed. The BST interviewed USDA agencies in 10 of Reclamation’s 17 Western states at the state office and service center/county level. The states surveyed were California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming. In addition, members of the USDA Service Center Implementation Team were interviewed.

BST Sub-Teams. BST members chose to work both as a total team and also on sub-teams. The four sub-teams included planning, data collecting, analyzing, and presentation. Adequate members were assigned to guarantee overlap between the sub-teams; therefore some data collecting sub-team members also were on the analyzing sub-team.

Collecting. During the data collecting phase, the BST realized the importance of having a proven method in place for analyzing collected information. As a result, a process was established which assisted the team in developing real solutions beneficial to Reclamation as a whole. The process defined the problem in greater detail, looked for root causes, and generated solutions. The team’s benchmarking study report and supporting recommendations and implementation plans provide the foundation for recommended solutions to be tested, implemented, and tracked. The BST believes that if they are implemented, marked improvements will be seen in Reclamations overall customer satisfaction rating on the next customer service survey. The BST has developed solutions which in most cases can be measured. However, standards must be established and performance measured against them.

Analysis. The BST analysis process focused on root causes and elimination of symptoms. Usually when problems arise we tend to treat the symptoms instead of stepping back to find the root cause. Treating symptoms is costly and never really resolves the problem. Therefore, in the initial analysis steps, the sub-team fully defined the problem prior to its root cause focus. To determine the root cause, the process involved brainstorming, multi-voting, rank ordering, and root cause matrices. Brainstorming developed numerous ideas from which the sub-team discussed the issues to understand and clarify. Substantial reliance was placed on the internal and external benchmarking partner interview and questionnaire data. Multi-voting and rank ordering helped the team to focus and narrow the list to the most important problem causes. The root cause matrix concentrated on determining if the cause was really a cause of a symptom or a root cause. Finally, the team decided what percentage of the problem the cause was and strived to focus on one root cause where possible.

Once a root cause was determined and selected the BST looked for solutions — specifically adaptable processes, products, or services from the benchmark partners. Ideas were again generated by brainstorming with data from all benchmarking partner questionnaires considered. Multi-voting and rank ordering were used to focus and narrow the list to the most significant solutions. A solution matrix was used to identify costs of implementation, do-ability, whether it fits within Reclamation's policies, could we implement it within a short time period, and how easy it could be done.

The analysis process was extracted from a certified public manager course developed by the State of Utah in conjunction with the University of Utah. The process is also consistent with training taught in 16 other states which have public manager certification programs. It also uses the most current knowledge of problem solving and team behavior sciences.

Recommendations and Implementation Plans

Separate from this summary is the recommendation and implementation plan report which deals with the final three steps in the process: testing, implementation and tracking effectiveness. A brief summary of the processes, products and services are listed only as a point of reference.

Through a benchmarking process, the Customer Service Benchmarking Study Team (BST) identified “pockets of excellence” within Reclamation and the USDA Service Centers that have:

- Measurable customer service processes, products, and services can be adapted within Reclamation
- Organizational units within Reclamation are addressing some customer service needs through the components contained in these recommendations

The BST recommendations provide adaptable processes, products, or services which can be appropriately applied at any organizational level within Reclamation and as adapted will support the overall intent of meeting a Reclamation-wide 85 percent customer service satisfaction level by fiscal year 2005.

To accomplish the customer service philosophy and an overall satisfaction level by 2005, the Commissioner and Policy Team are presented the following recommendations determined to have the greatest long term benefits for Reclamation and our customers.

g Ensure a Point of Contact (POC) focus throughout Reclamation

Identify and Expand Point of Contacts
Provide Point of Contact Lists Internally and Externally
Support Point of Contact’s Customer Service Role
Build Point of Contact Knowledge and Capability
Use Customer Service Boards
Periodically Evaluate Point of Contact Effectiveness

g Communicate Effectively with Customers

Use Protocols for Written Communication Types
Involve Customers
Establish Standards
Monitor Communication Performance
Keep Customers Informed
Make it Easy for Customers to Provide Feedback

g Successfully Work With Different Customer Groups

Assure Point of Contacts Involved with Groups
Maintain Continuous Point of Contact Outreach
Point of Contact Focus is “Servicing Customer Groups”

g Pilot Test Customer Service Training Module

Evaluate “Best in the Business” Vendor Product and Determine Appropriateness

g Tools and Resources in Support of Customer Services

Effectively Use Tools and Resources
Assure a Live Voice for Published Numbers
 “Guidance for Use of Automatic Phone Answering Equipment” Commissioner’s Memorandum
Evaluate Devices and Systems Intended to Support Customer Service
Tools are an “Aid” Not the “Fix”
Use Customer Service Emerging Technology Team Concept

The BST is confident the recommendations address the deep underlying concerns of Reclamations employees and customers. The BST requests that the individuals responsible for implementation of these recommendations take the time to understand the basis for the suggested changes and consult with or consider using BST members in the implementation phase. It is the team’s belief that involvement of one or BST members in the process of implementing the recommended changes may result in greater success. Finally, the team would appreciate comments and input from Reclamation’s directors and managers.

Supporting Definitions

Reclamation specific definitions are in *bold italics*

Benchmark —

- A standard against which something can be measured. A previously determined position used as a reference point.

Benchmarking —

- *A systematic comparison of specific business practices to find and adapt ideas which will improve services to our customers.* (Reclamation Benchmarking Workshop, June 1999, BOR)

Best Practices —

- The methods used in work processes whose output best meets customer requirements. (Spendolini, 1992)

Customer —

- *Reclamation's customers are those individuals or entities that use or receive products, services, or information that result from the processes which the agency performs. Examples of Reclamation customers are irrigators, recreationists, water users, rural and urban power users, and Native Americans.* (Guide for Developing Customer Service Plans, September 1994, BOR)

External Customer —

- An individual or group outside the boundaries of the producing organization who receive or use the output of a process. (NPR-1997, Appendix I; and, U.S. Navy TQL Glossary, 1996)

Internal Customer —

- An individual or group inside the boundaries of the producing organization who receives or uses the output from a previous stage of a process in order to contribute to production of the final product or service. (NPR-1997, Appendix I; and, U.S. Navy TQL Glossary, 1996)

End-user —

- The person for whom a product or service is intended. That person may be the user and/or buyer of the product or service, (U.S. Navy TQL Glossary, 1996).

Partner —

- *Reclamation's partners are those groups, agencies, or entities that jointly help Reclamation serve its customers. Examples of Reclamation's partners are water districts, conservation districts, Native American tribal governments, the Western Area Power Administration, local utilities, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Corps of Engineers.* (Guide for Developing Customer Service Plans, September 1994, BOR)

Stakeholder —

- *Stakeholders involved in Reclamation's business and services are interested parties who do not receive the service directly. Some examples of stakeholders are the Congress, national interest groups, taxpayers, and states.* (Guide for Developing Customer Service Plans, September 1994, BOR)

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